



PATRICK TESTIN STATE SENATOR

Op-Ed: *Wisconsin's Gone to the Cows*

As May turns to June in Wisconsin, the weather gets warmer, the days grow longer, and our thoughts turn to... cows? Yes, in Wisconsin, we celebrate our rich and diverse agricultural heritage with beef month in May and dairy month in June. I want to take this opportunity to recognize the important contributions that beef and dairy farmers are making to our state throughout the year, not only with their fine products, but also by offering employment opportunities to thousands of our neighbors across the state.

It's fitting that Wisconsin, the birthplace of the hamburger, should have a thriving beef industry. Each year, our farmers produce 2.3 million pounds of beef on nearly 15,000 farms – that's almost 4% of our country's annual production. That translates to \$2.1 billion worth of economic activity, and jobs for over 35,000 Wisconsinites. Better yet, beef farming is growing. Between 2003 and 2013, Wisconsin was one of ten states where the beef herd size is increasing, and had the second highest rate of growth in the country. A lot of that growth is happening right here in the 24th Senate District, where Monroe County is one of the top five counties for beef cattle in the state. In an era where people are taking a greater interest in where their food comes from, I'm happy to know that it's becoming more likely that my steak came from somewhere close to home.

Of course, when it comes to cheese, there's an even better chance it was made proudly in Wisconsin. We are first in the country in cheese production (3.2 billion pounds!) and second in milk production, accounting for more than one quarter of America's cheese, and about one seventh of its milk. Dairy injects more than \$43 billion into the state's economy every year, and provides jobs for 165,000 workers. All of this activity begins, of course, on one of over 9,500 farms – 96% of which are family owned.

In Central and Western Wisconsin, we should take pride in what our farmers do to feed the world. We also need to work to ensure that the farming way of life continues to thrive here. The average age of a farmer in our state is now fifty-eight. We need to encourage the development of the next generation of farmers. That's why I've authored a bill with Rep. Evan Goyke (D-Milwaukee) that would create a program at the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) to assist military veterans who want to make the transition into farming. By growing a ready workforce the future, we guarantee that Wisconsin will remain a leader in beef, dairy, and crop agriculture for years to come.